The root of the Veratrum has a bitter taste accompanied with acrimony, and leaves a durable impression on the mouth and fauces when it has been chewed or swallowed. It abounds with a resinous juice, which adheres closely to a knife with which the root has been cut. This resin dissolves abundantly in alcohol. When water is added to the solution, a white turbidness gradually appears rendering the liquid opaque, but without sediment. The decoction has an intensely bitter taste. It is not rendered turbid by alcohol although some slight flocculi are separated after standing. It is probable that this bitterness resides in an extractive principle. The distilled water of the root has a slightly unpleasant taste, without bitterness or pungency.

This plant in its medicinal powers resembles the Veratrum album or White hellebore of Europe. It is an acrid emetic and a powerful stimulant, followed by sedative effects. As a medicine or as a poisonous plant, it has been known from an early period. The aborigines of the country were fully apprized of its activity. Josselyn in his voyage to New England, which took place not long after the first settlement of the country, informs us that the young Indians had a custom of electing their chiefs by a sort of ordeal instituted

with the roots of this plant, which he denominates "white hellebore." A portion of this root was repeatedly given to each individual, and he whose stomach made the most vigorous resistance or soonest recovered from its effects was considered the stoutest of the party and entitled to command the rest.

Kalm tells us that the people of this country, at the time of his travels, employed a decoction of this plant externally in the cure of scorbutic affections, and for the destruction of vermin. He further states, that corn before planting was soaked in a strong decoction of the Veratrum to protect it against the birds which infest our fields and devour the grain after it is deposited in the ground. When the corn is thus prepared, it is observed, that those birds which swallow it become giddy and fall to the ground, an example, the writer informs us, which has the effect to frighten the remainder of the tribe away from the place.

Since the celebrity acquired by the European white hellebore as a remedy for *gout*, that plant being for a time supposed the basis of the celebrated *Eau medicinale;* the attention of some practitioners has been turned to investigating the properties of the American plant, which so close-

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